



NEWS RELEASE

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SBA ADMINISTRATOR AIDA ALVAREZ AND AMERICAN EXPRESS TO KICK OFF NATIONAL SMALL BUSINESS WEEK WITH ONLINE CHAT

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and American Express will kick off National Small Business Week 2000 by hosting a live, online chat with SBA Administrator Aida Alvarez, Monday, May 22, 2000, at 5 p.m. ET. This event is the first online chat in the American Express Small Business Services *Voices from Main Street* initiative.

The online chat will provide a forum for small business owners nationwide to discuss relevant issues for entrepreneurs. Administrator Alvarez will answer questions covering such topics as raising capital, maximizing the profitability of small businesses and other concerns that affect small businesses.

"I look forward to personally talking with small business owners about issues important to them," Administrator Alvarez said. **"This exchange of information will provide fellow entrepreneurs the tools they need to succeed."**

Easy on-line access will be available through the agency's Web site at www.sba.gov. Business owners may also join the chat by visiting American Express' *Voices from Main Street* site at www.americanexpress.com/voices.

American Express Small Business Services launched the *Voices from Main Street* communications program to engage small business owners in a national dialogue about issues that matter most to them.

The SBA will honor the nation's top entrepreneurs during National Small Business Week with a three-day celebration in the nation's capital May 23-25. The festivities in Washington will include the naming of a national Small Business Person of the Year. The national winner is selected from 53 Small Business Persons of the Year - one from each state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and Guam.

"During National Small Business Week here in Washington, the SBA is proud to honor the men and women whose entrepreneurial successes and personal achievements help create jobs and help communities grow," said Administrator Alvarez. **"They truly deserve this recognition."**

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For more information on National Small Business Week and a complete list of award winners, visit the SBA's Small Business Week Web site at <http://smallbusinesssuccess.sba.gov>. Additional information about SBA programs and services is available at SBA's Web site at <http://www.sba.gov> or by calling the **SBA Answer Desk** at **1-800-U-ASK-SBA**. For other information about *Voices from Main Street*, visit the Small Business Exchange at <http://www.americanexpress.com/smallbusiness>.

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The SBA, established in 1953, provides financial, technical and management assistance to help Americans start, run, and grow their businesses. With a portfolio of business loans, loan guaranties and disaster loans worth almost \$50 billion, the SBA is the nation's largest single financial backer of small businesses. Last year, the SBA offered management and technical assistance to more than one million small business owners.

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